



David Griffiths  
Evidence, 1992

A series of  
site specific  
lens-based  
installations  
and  
performances  
around the  
East End of  
London.  
Organised by  
Camerawork

# river crossings

light and sound along the thames

The idea for River Crossings first came into being about five years ago, and we are now pleased to announce that it will take place early this year in the confidence that it is set to be a major art event in Britain. River Crossings brings together the work of artists accomplished and experienced in the fields of photography, new media and performance especially in relation to publicly sited artworks. Organised by Camerawork Gallery and Darkroom, the exhibition marks a departure from the gallery into public space.

None of the installations presents the photograph exclusively as a medium, but they all have their roots in photography through the use of slide projection, video and light. Most of the pieces are multi-media in correspondence to, and in contemplation of, the image-saturated '90s. River Crossings makes no claim on this kind of work; artists are responding increasingly with interdisciplinary pieces, photographers being no exception.

With the introduction of new digital media across all artforms this seems an inevitability, and the aim is to reflect this in a newly refurbished Camerawork later this year. Camerawork was set up in the mid-1970s and has developed into a gallery and darkroom resource concerned with presenting issues of gender, race, disability and sexual orientation through photography. It is the responsibility of arts and media organisations to reassess their approach to basic policies and we believe that River Crossings is an event organised in direct response to changes in culture, approach to the visual arts, and communities.

Events of this type are becoming common currency across Britain and the rest of Europe often claiming to be the first of their kind or to be the panacea for urban decay. River Crossings makes no such definitive statements – it aims to present sensitively, although sometimes polemically, some of the issues surrounding London's East End and communications culture in general. We are grateful to



*Creative Camera* for allowing us part of this issue to present some of the arguments around public art and events of this nature. In recent years Public Art has replaced Community Arts as a tool for democratisation of the visual arts. Much of the emphasis has been on permanent pieces in shopping centres and parks with photography being largely marginalised. There is no reason why photography should not be made permanent in public spaces but it is with temporarily sited public artworks that River Crossings is concerned and the essays in this issue focus on this phenomenon.

Since the late '80s, the optimism for Docklands development has dwindled with the demise of Olympia & York, rows of empty office blocks, and the perpetual indecision about the Jubilee Line extension. This has not deterred visitors to Docklands and has provided considerable source material for the contemporary artist. River Crossings has evolved in response to these changes. What began five years ago as a critical celebration of the development of London's contemporary culture in Docklands, through a festival of light projections, has become an examination of London's history of communication via the Thames, and a presentation of current thought around ownership and place. The works in the exhibition approach issues of the effects of urban development on local communities; historical methods of transport and communication; and look at the more generic implications of communications networks in the global/local context.

Architecture and engineering is a focus for a number of the artists, using sites such as the Queen's House at Greenwich, the Greenwich and Woolwich Foot Tunnels, the Royal Observatory, and the disused lido at Southwark Park. Paradoxically, in the face of all the Docklands development, all the architectural sites chosen have a historical base or a strong link with the local communities – perhaps a tacit acknowledgment of the perceived alienation of urban restructuring. Correspondingly, the

# march 18 – april 11 and may 1

transport routes chosen refer back to another era – the East London Line (the oldest underground line), the Woolwich Free Ferry and the North Woolwich Station Museum. Most of the pieces use the history of the sites to recontextualise the contemporary global culture of digital media and its associated time/space compressions. In one case, the whole process is inverted – using the hi-tech satellite dishes of BT's British Teleport the artist alludes to underground communications and broadcasting through the presentation of piracy in its literal historical sense.

Currently there is a sense of contemporary culture in flux. There is an interest and apprehension around political and cultural shifts as the situation changes daily, and a fascination in the prediction of what if anything will eventually emerge. The intention for River Crossings is to provide a highly visual forum for lively discussion and debate around these issues. ●

**Helen Sloan, Exhibitions Organiser**



Kiss Wall by Bruce Williams.

Photo by Bruce Williams

**Thanks to**



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